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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000347

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS AND PRM
BANGKOK FOR REFCOORD TIM SCHERER
HO CHI MINH CITY FOR TIM SWANSON
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF CB VM

SUBJECT: TWO MONTAGNARDS DEPORTED FROM CAMBODIA, TWO RAN AWAY

¶11. (SBU) Summary: During an April 25 deportation, two Montagnard Vietnamese citizens who arrived at the UNHCR in Cambodia after May 1, 2007 quietly boarded a Cambodian Government-arranged minivan at a Phnom Penh UNHCR site and headed for the Vietnam border. However, sometime during the previous night, two other Montagnard individuals scheduled for deportation on April 25 presumably ran away from the Phnom Penh site and have not yet been located. A Cambodian Ministry of Interior official on site stated that if the two runaways are found or return, they will not be arrested and they will be deported with the next group of departing Montagnard individuals. End summary.

Quiet Deportation of Two Montagnards

¶12. (SBU) In an early morning deportation on April 25, two Montagnard Vietnamese citizens quietly boarded a Cambodian Government-arranged minivan at a Phnom Penh UNHCR site and headed for the Vietnam border. The two individuals arrived at the UNHCR in Cambodia after May 1, 2007, the cutoff date for Montagnard arrivals to be considered for U.S. resettlement if UNHCR denied them refugee status. UNHCR Phnom Penh stated that the two -- one female and one male -- arrived in June 2007, showing that current UNHCR processing takes approximately 10 months for someone who is turned down for refugee status. The individuals were each given a humanitarian resettlement letter on U.S. Embassy letterhead. The letter explains in English, Vietnamese, and Jarai languages that if the individual faces persecution or harassment, he or she may contact Embassy Hanoi or Consulate Ho Chi Minh City, and provides the contact information for the Consulate. There were no media or NGO representatives on site during the deportation.

Two Others Ran Away

¶13. (SBU) The deportation was originally planned for five individuals. When Poloff, the UNHCR, and Ministry of Interior staff arrived at the site in the morning, it was discovered that two of the individuals were missing and presumably ran away during the night. UNHCR Phnom Penh staff has stated in previous meetings with Poloff that some Montagnard individuals at the sites have been known to jump over the site walls at night to go out drinking or to buy beer or other things to bring into the site. However, according to UNHCR Phnom Penh, this is the first time individuals have run away when they were to be deported. The senior Ministry of Interior (MOI) official on site for the

deportation, Deputy Director of the Internal Security Department Mr. Sovann, asked for Poloff's advice when it was discovered the two were missing. Poloff and the MOI official agreed it would be best to continue with the deportation of the other two in order to discourage others from attempting to thwart repatriation plans by running away.

The Runaways Are Welcome Back at the Site

¶4. (SBU) The two runaways are now considered illegal immigrants. They have been turned down for refugee status by the UNHCR and they entered Cambodia illegally. Initially, the MOI official stated loudly in front of the other Montagnards about throwing the two in jail when they are found. Poloff counseled Sovann not to arrest the individuals if they are found or if they return to the site, but rather to let the runaways re-enter the UNHCR site and join with the next group of deportees. Sovann then agreed that the runaways will be allowed to come back to the site. He stated that the MOI would talk to them about Cambodia's immigration law, and about their current status. He also noted that if they run away a second time, after this "education," that they would be arrested. The fifth person who was to have been deported has a wife at the same site who arrived after he did. The wife's refugee status determination (RSD) processing is not yet complete and UNHCR determined that the husband should stay until the wife's processing is finished. In fact, all five individuals originally scheduled for deportation received humanitarian resettlement letters in English, Vietnamese and Jarai languages.

Current Phnom Penh Site Montagnard Numbers

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¶5. (SBU) As of April 21, there were 569 Montagnards at the UNHCR sites in Phnom Penh -- 147 persons at Site 1, 94 at Site 2, and 328 at Site 3. Site 3 holds mostly "new arrivals." The UNHCR reports that there have been 161 Montagnard arrivals since January 2008 and all of them have arrived directly to Phnom Penh, none through Ratanakiri or Mondulkiri. The monthly breakdown is as follows: 51 arrivals in January, 21 in February, 76 in March, and 13 so far in April.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Despite the MOI official's initial ranting over the two runaways, he showed evenness in tone when discussing what would happen next with Poloff. His decision to continue with the deportation, and to allow the runaways to come back to the UNHCR site if they are found are telling signs that the Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to an undeterred yet compassionate process. Most who were on site for the deportation expressed concern for the two runaways. One UNHCR staffperson wondered aloud if they might have returned back to Vietnam on their own. Post will continue to seek updates with the UNHCR and will report if there is news on the runaways' whereabouts.

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